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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 000038

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: GREEK PRIME MINISTER TO CALL ON ECUMENICAL  
PATRIARCH IN ISTANBUL

REF: A. ANKARA 0102

[1](#)B. 07 ISTANBUL 0942

[1](#)C. 07 ANKARA 2998

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Greek PM Costas Karamanlis will wrap up his three-day trip to Turkey on January 24 and 25 in Istanbul with visits to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and to a Greek minority high school. Ecumenical Patriarchate senior advisor Metropolitan Meliton expects Karamanlis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to discuss GOG advocacy for Patriarchate interests including the re-opening of Halki Seminary, Greek minority property rights and Turkey's non-interference regarding the administration of Greek minority community parish councils. He hoped the Patriarchate would benefit from improved relations between Greece and Turkey. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis will conclude his much heralded three-day visit to Turkey (ref A) on January 24 and 25 in Istanbul where he will call on Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and visit a Greek minority high school. Metropolitan Meliton, a senior advisor to Bartholomew, told us there is no official agenda for the meeting, however he expects Bartholomew will reiterate the Patriarchate's long standing grievances (ref B) against the Turkish government and recount more recent developments, including the interference by Turkish authorities on the administration of Greek minority community parish councils. The two will likely also discuss the new Law on Foundations recently passed in committee and soon to be taken up by the parliament at-large (ref C).

[1](#)3. (C) Noting Karamanlis had paid an unofficial courtesy call on the Ecumenical Patriarch in April 2007 when the Greek Prime Minister was in Istanbul for the BSEC 15th Anniversary Gala celebration, Meliton characterized relations between the Greek Government and the Patriarchate as "good." He appreciated the GOG's advocacy on behalf of the Patriarchate regarding resolution to the latter's concerns. Indeed, press widely reported on January 24 that PM Karamanlis had included Patriarchate issues, including re-opening Halki Seminary and recognizing the ecumenicity of the Patriarchate, in a list of "old" demands delivered to Turkish PM Erdogan when the two met on January 23. Turkish media claimed Karamanlis placed reopening of Halki in the category of "must dos" if Turkey is to enter the EU. Erdogan reportedly responded that the GOT was "evaluating" the Halki issue. Meliton expressed hope that the GOG might be able to leverage improved relations with Turkey to more effectively advance resolutions to the Patriarchate's many concerns.

14. (C) Comment. Increased public attention to Turkey-Greece relations resulting from Karamanlis' historic visit demands a delicate balancing act from Bartholomew. He has told us he often feels caught in the middle between Turkey and Greece with the former accusing him of being an instrument of the GOG, while the latter believes the GOT uses him to pressure the GOG into expanding rights for the Turkish minority in Greece. Further Turkey-Greece rapprochement could well lay the foundation in Turkey for public acceptance of overtures such as re-opening Halki Seminary under terms agreeable to all. End comment.

WIENER